

5-2019

## California Rural Legal Assistance Employment Education Outreach Project

Daisy Leon Melendrez  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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### Recommended Citation

Leon Melendrez, Daisy, "California Rural Legal Assistance Employment Education Outreach Project" (2019). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 524.  
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California Rural Legal Assistance Employment Education Outreach Project

Daisy Leon Melendrez

California Rural Legal Assistance, Giselle Sanchez and Judy Vazquez

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University of Monterey Bay

May 7, 2019

**Abstract**

California Rural Legal Assistance is a nonprofit law firm that provides no cost legal services to low-income individuals in Santa Cruz County. The social problem is that too many workers face employment rights violations. The agency problem is a reduction in the number of people seeking employment legal services from CRLA. This outreach project focused on spreading awareness of CRLA's employment legal services by attending local grocery stores and farmer's market, with the purpose of promoting agency's services to the community. Agency materials were distributed and a questionnaire was used to determine why people are not seeking CRLA legal services. Results show that nearly 80% of individuals had never heard of CRLA legal services. In the future the agency should provide and promote outreach activities at community events, to reach their goal of educating Santa Cruz County residents about their employment rights and the agency's employment legal services.

*Keywords:* employment legal services, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), lack of awareness, Santa Cruz County, outreach

**Agency and Community Served**

The California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) is a nonprofit legal service organization that was created to help and support low income communities in California. CRLA was founded in 1966 due to a lack of legal assistance for low income communities (CRLA, 2011). There are currently 23 CRLA offices located across 22 counties across California (CRLA, 2011). Its mission is to fight for justice and individual's rights alongside the most exploited communities. Its vision of justice is for all people to be treated with respect and dignity and guaranteed their right of protection (CRLA, 2011).

Every year CRLA provides over 50,000 low income individuals with legal assistance and outreach programs across California. The agency serves a wide range of clients, which include individuals with disabilities, school children, seniors, immigrants and, individuals who identify themselves as lesbian/ gay/ bisexual and transgender. CRLA staff focus on conducting legal action, outreach and legal education in regards to individual's rights on most urgent issues. The five legal areas of priority for CRLA are education disparities, housing, civil rights, family security, labor and employment (CRLA, 2011).

One of the goals of all CRLA offices in California is to educate members of the community on their employment rights and assist them in speaking out if their employer is violating their working rights. CRLA provides a wide range of employment protections including: overtime wage claims, retaliation, discrimination against and sexual harassment in the work place (CRLA, 2011).

The CRLA office in Watsonville serves low income individuals living in Santa Cruz County. The CRLA local offices are located in Salinas and Watsonville California. The CRLA partners with several agencies in Santa Cruz County such as: The Pajaro Valley Unified School

District, Community Action Board of Santa Cruz, The Watsonville Law Center, Santa Cruz Bar Association, Lawyer Referral Services of Santa Cruz County and many others. The partnerships with these agencies consist of creating community projects, sending and receiving referrals, developing collaborative grant proposals and exchanging government/ legal information.

### **Problem Description**

The agency's problem is that the CRLA office in Watsonville has experienced a decrease in number of employment cases and clients since January 2018. If this agency problem is not addressed in a couple of months it may cause the CRLA to lose funding if the number of clients and employment cases do not increase. This is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed because losing funding can mean that the CRLA may be restricted to how many clients and employment cases they can take. It can also cause the CRLA office in Watsonville to be closed if they are not receiving enough funding to remain open and provide services.

As shown in the table below the social problem that impacts the community is that the employment right's of individual's are being violated because they are not fully aware of their worker rights and the legal services that are out there for them. The Working for Dignity: Low Wage Worker Study was conducted in 2014 to collect reliable data on the working experiences of low wage workers in Santa Cruz County. In this research project, more than 1,300 surveys and 76 in-depth interviews with low- income workers were conducted. The results indicate that low wage workers in the Santa Cruz County are experiencing serious violations in the work place (McKay, 2015). Details on the study can be found in appendix A.

The following table provides information in regards to the causes and consequences of the agency problem that the project is aimed to address and social problem that impacts the community.

**Problem Model**

| <b><u>Problem Model</u></b>  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Problem Statement:</b> Employment rights of individuals are being violated by their employers.  |   |  |
| <b>Causes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of adequate outreach</li> <li>• Community members do not have transportation</li> <li>• CRLA's location and/or hours of intake are difficult for working people</li> <li>• Worker's schedule restrictions</li> <li>• Afraid to speak out</li> </ul> | <b>Agency Problem:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are fewer people coming into the agency to seek employment legal services.</li> </ul> | <b>Consequences:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lose funding</li> <li>• Agency can be forced to be closed down due to the lack of funding</li> <li>• Continued violations of employee right's</li> </ul>                             |
| <b>Causes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals not having documentation</li> <li>• Employers not paying their employees overtime because employers refuse to pay employees more money</li> <li>• Worker's lack of awareness about their employment rights</li> </ul>                        | <b>Social Problem:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many workers face employment rights violations.</li> </ul>                              | <b>Consequences:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees not compensated for overtime</li> <li>• Employees not being able to provide for their families</li> <li>• Families living below poverty</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> </ul> |

As shown in the table above the causes of the agency problem of having a decline in the number of clients and employment cases is due to the lack of outreach and promotion. If the CRLA participated in more outreach events, then more people would be informed about the employment legal services they provide. The causes of the social problem that individual's employment rights can and sometimes are violated is due to the lack of education and awareness. The main consequences of the agency problem and social problem if they are not addressed is that CRLA can lose funding and the employment rights of individuals will continue to be

violated by employers. The alternatives to addressing the agency problem and social problem is conducting outreach and educating individuals about their employment legal rights and the services CRLA provides to low income communities.

### **Project Description & Justification**

The “California Rural Legal Assistance, Employment Educational and Outreach Project” is an educational/outreach project that focused on increasing the knowledge of Santa Cruz residents on the employment legal services that CRLA offers. This project also focused on educating individuals about their working rights and the legal actions they can take if their employers violate their rights.

The goal of this project was to inform and educate members of the community about their worker rights and the employment legal services that the agency provides. Another goal of the project was to increase the number of people who come to CRLA’s Watsonville office for a legal consultations and increase the number of cases. By the implementation of this project, CRLA wanted to accomplished their goal/ mission of fighting for the justice and rights of individuals who are being exploited by employers.

The outreach/education component of the project consisted of attending the Farmers Market that was held every Friday from 2:00pm to 7:00pm at 328 Union Street in Watsonville and to local grocery stores in Watsonville such as La Princesa Market, Santa Fe Market and Safeway. At theses outreach events the interns informed the public on the employment legal services that the agency offers, and educated them on their working rights. A brief questionnaire was distributed to individuals who attended tabling events at the Farmer’s Market and grocery stores with the purpose of finding out if people knew about the agency and the employment services they provide. Also with the purpose of finding out whether they have ever used CRLA legal services and what

are the challenges preventing people from accessing these employment services. Details on the questionnaire can be found on appendix C.

### **Project Implementation**

For this project, several methods were used in order for the interns to be able to conduct outreach during tabling events and collecting responses to the short questionnaire. In the outreach aspect of the project, the methods that were used is content development, promotion strategy, logistics and funding. All the materials used at the tabling events, such as a questionnaire, flyers, informational brochures and other important materials were well developed and organized. CRLA has several employment informational brochures, and a “know your working right’s” brochures that were used for the tabling events. In this project the interns and mentors from the agency participated in the creation and implementation of this project. The interns contacted the director of the Watsonville Farmers Market to reserve a spot for the tabling events that took place in Watsonville on Fridays. The interns also contacted the local grocery stores and were able to get permission to be there. For a detailed scope work on the agency’s implementation of the project see Appendix B.

### **Benefits from the Capstone Project**

The conduction of this educational/outreach project was able to provide several benefits to CRLA and residents of Santa Cruz County. Providing outreach tabling events in Watsonville has helped inform members of the community on their worker’s rights and available CRLA employment legal services and assistance. This project also helped the agency find out what is preventing residents from coming into the office for services. Knowing all this information from the data collected from the questionnaire will serve as a guide for the agency to find ways to address the agency problem.



**Resources Needed and Challenges**

The resources that were needed for the implementation of this project were colored paper, scissors, printer, tables, chairs, pens and additional funding for the other materials that were needed for this project.

A challenge that the interns experienced while attending outreach events and local grocery stores was that several individuals were not willing to answer the short questionnaire. The interns encounter several rude individuals that would put their heads on the interns face because they did not want to answer the questionnaire. At first the interns were concern that they would not have enough questionnaires filled out by the public, which meant that they might of turned out with limited data. However, that was not the case and the interns were able to have 180 questionnaires filled out by the public. Another challenge that was present during the implementation of the project was that many grocery stores did not let the interns stand in front of the store and educate the public on the CRLA services. The interns were only able to get permission from 3 grocery stores. Due to not having permission from other grocery stores the interns were not able to reach out to more individuals and educate them about the CRLA services.

**Assessment Plan**

The expected outcome of this overall project was to inform and educate members of the community about the legal services CRLA provides and their legal rights. With this project the interns were able to educate about 200 to 300 individuals on the legal services the agency provides. The assessment measure that was used during this project was to evaluate the responses from the questionnaire. The overall outcome of the project was achieved because the interns did educate several individuals about CRLA services. The interns were also able to learn the reasons why

people are not assessing CRLA legal services. The method that was used to assess the project progress was to keep track of all the responses from the questionnaire. After receiving all of the data the interns had a meeting with their mentors where they discuss the findings of the questionnaire. The mentors were surprised and impressed with the results of the project. The mentors disclose that the findings of the questionnaire will be used as proof to show the head of CRLA that the agency has to prioritize outreach because members of the community are not aware of CRLA services. During the meeting the interns also discussed with their mentors on changes that the agency can make to address the agency problem.

### **Findings and Results of Assessment Process**

From attending the tabling events and going out to local grocery stores the interns were able to have 180 members of the community complete the questionnaire. The interns achieved the expected outcome of the project by receiving sufficient data that proves the cause of the agency problem. The lack of awareness of services is the cause for the agency seeing a decline on the number of individuals coming in for services. If individuals are not aware of the agency services, then people will not come into to the office. The language spoken by individuals who participated in the questionnaire was tracked. About 67 % of participants responded in Spanish and 33% of participants responded in English.

The first question of the questionnaire: “Do you know about the legal services that CRLA provides?” 79% of participants did not know about the CRLA legal services and 21% of participants did know about the CRLA services. As for the second question of the questionnaire: “Have you accessed CRLA legal services” 92% of participants have never accessed CRLA services and 8% of the participants have accessed CRLA services.

The last question of the questionnaire: “What are some challenges that would prevent you from accessing CRLA legal services?” participants were given multiple options to respond to the question. The respond options for participants were: having no challenge, or responding that a possible challenge could be: work availability, location, transportation, hours of intake or other reasons. Table 3 shows the percentage number of participants who said that there is a challenge that would prevent them from coming into the agency. The rated challenges from highest to lowest: 44% of participants said there was no challenges, 23% said work availability would be a challenge because of their busy work schedule, 15% said the lack of transportation would be challenge, 8% mentioned that the location of the agency is a possible challenge, 6% said that the limited hours of intake could be a possible challenge and 4% mentioned other possible challenges that would prevent them from coming into the agency for services.

Table 3

| <b>Challenges</b>      |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| No obstacles           | 44% |
| Work Availability      | 23% |
| Lack of Transportation | 15% |
| Location               | 8%  |
| Hours of Intake        | 6%  |
| Other                  | 4%  |
| Total                  | 180 |

The expected outcome of this project was achieved because about 200 to 300 individuals learned about the CRLA legal services and their employment rights. The results of the questionnaire indicate that residents of the Santa Cruz County are not fully aware of CRLA services and have not access the agency’s services. The results of the project indicate that the main cause of the agency problem is that people are not aware of the agency’s services. The results of the questionnaire also helped determine what are the main challenges that prevent

people from coming into the agency. The project was noted to be successful because the cause of the agency problem was identified by the results of the project. During tabling events the interns were also able to meet directors of community agencies that decided to take CRLA flyers and give that information to their clients.

### **Recommendations**

The results of the questionnaire indicate that in order for CRLA to address the issue of having a low number of clients and cases they should make some immediate changes. The first recommendation is to extend office hours on intake days from 9am to 8pm only during the agriculture season. Intake days are only on Tuesday's which means that the agency would only have to extend office hours once a week. The reason why the agency should consider expanding their office hours during intake day's is because the results of the questionnaire indicate that the highest challenge that prevents people from coming into the agency for services is their limited work schedule. Also many of their clients work in agriculture and they get off from work late so extending office hours until 8pm on intake days will give these agriculture workers the opportunity to seek services after their off from work. Another possible solution if extending hours on intake day does not work is opening evening intake sessions any day of the week to accommodate all those individuals that get out of work late.

Another important recommendation that will help address the agency problem is for the agency to be involved in conducting more outreach. The agency can spread more awareness on the services they provided by attending huge community events, putting an informational flyer of their services on all community bulletin boards, attending local farmers market and going out to local grocery stores. Also going out to local radio stations and requesting to say a message to the public about the CRLA legal services. Doing these outreach activities can help the agency

inform the public about the services they provide. The agency should also make sure they have a staff member that is bilingual when going out to the community and conducting outreach because the results of the questionnaire indicate that almost 75% of residents speak Spanish.

## **Conclusion**

Having the opportunity to intern at CRLA for almost a year and a half, and being able to create a project that address a problem that the agency is facing help be gain important skills sets and knowledge that I will use in my profession. Designing and implementing a year long agency project was not an easy process but through this experience I learned how important it is to plan ahead of time and how to organize a long term project. The most important thing I learned from creating and implementing this project is that not everything goes as plan and I just have to work with the new changes. The experience that contributed to my learning goals is knowing how to work with individuals that might be disrespectful. For example, when I would go out to local grocery stores I would encounter people that were disrespectful and would put their hands in my face because they were not willing to respond to the questionnaire. At first I was upset when people were disrespectful to me but I soon realize I couldn't let that get to me or else it would get in the way of my work. From this experience, I learned how to professionally address individuals that are being disrespectful. What I will learn from this project in 10 years from now is the importance of planning ahead when I want to implement a long term project in my profession or in my personal life. The advice I would give to future CHHS interns is the importance of being open minded and willing to learn about the agency and the staff. When implementing their capstone project, I would recommend the interns to make step by step plans for their capstone project, and if they have any concerns about the project they should ask their agency mentors for guidance and help.

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**Appendix A:****Case Study- Violation of workers rights in the Santa Cruz County**

In Santa Cruz County there were several accidents in which workers were not getting paid for working overtime and were experiencing several working violations. In 2014, there was a two-year long research project collaboration between the CRLA, University of California Santa Cruz Center for Labor Studies, the University of California Santa Cruz Chicano Latino Research Center and the Day Worker Center of Santa Cruz County (McKay, 2015). The research project was called “Working for Dignity: Low Wage Worker Study”. The purpose of this study was to collect reliable data on the working experiences of low wage workers in Santa Cruz County. In this research project, more than 1,300 surveys and 76 in-depth interviews with low- income workers were conducted (McKay, 2015). According to the project results,

“for those respondents not in agriculture 38.3% stated they worked more than 8 hours a day or more than 40 hours a week. Of those that did, 38% stated that they experienced some form of overtime pay violation or wage theft. Of those that worked overtime, about 47% of Latinos stated they experienced overtime pay violations, while 50% of Whites (non-Hispanics), 52% of African-Americans, and 39% of Asians that worked overtime stated they experienced wage theft. In terms of gender, 44% of men and 51% of women that worked overtime stated they experienced overtime pay violations” (McKay, 2015, pg.23).

The results from this study demonstrate that wage theft is a common problem because a high percentage of these workers were not getting paid overtime. In terms of gender, the research project indicates that women are more likely to experience wage theft than men.

Two types of wage theft were investigated including illegal appropriation of tipped income and non-provision of pay stubs. According to the study, “Of those in tipped workplaces, 14%

responded that their employers engaged in “tip stealing” or keeping some portion of workers’ tips, which is illegal. However, only 60% of our respondents stated they were provided with a legally mandated pay stub, either a paper copy or online” (McKay, 2015, pg. 26). According to the U.S Department of Labor tip, stealing is when “employers steal wages and tips from tipped workers through a number of schemes including: side work, illegal tip pool arrangements, off-the-clock work and credit card fees” (The Marlborough Law Firm, 2018). Workers in restaurants or bars reported they had experienced tip stealing from their employers and about 40% reported that they did not receive any pay stubs from their employers.

Lack of documentation makes it much more difficult for employees to know if they are being underpaid. This study explains that “50% of non-agriculture workers stated they experienced some form of break violation- either not receiving their mandated break, not being paid for their break, or having their breaks interrupted” (McKay, 2015, pg.24). The results indicate that about half of these workers from Santa Cruz experienced break violations. In terms of discrimination, “a fairly large percentage of our respondents, 22%, believed they were treated differently from other workers” (McKay, 2015, pg. 30). It’s clear that a number of workers experienced some type of discrimination in the work place.

Overall the results of this study, indicate a range of serious workplace violations across different industries and occupations from wage theft, to discrimination, to retaliation for workers trying to speak up for their rights. The purpose of this project was for agencies in Santa Cruz like the CRLA to inform themselves of the working experiences of local low wage workers. The results indicate that low wage workers are experiencing serious violations in the work place.



**Appendix B:**

|   |
|---|
| <b>Scope of Work</b>  |
| <b>Title:</b> California Rural Legal Assistance, Employment Education Outreach Project  |
| <b>Project Description:</b> This project is an educational/outreach project that will focus on increasing the knowledge of Santa Cruz County residents on the employment legal services offered by CRLA. This project will also focus on educating individuals about their working rights, and the legal actions they can take if their employers violate them. This project will include distributing a survey to find out if people in Santa Cruz County why people are not accessing these legal services. Tabling events will also take place at the Watsonville Farmers Market on Fridays to inform individuals on the legal service that the CRLA offers. |
| <b>Goal:</b> Increase the number of employment cases at the CRLA Watsonville office.  |
| <b>Primary objective of the project:</b> Educate members of the community on the legal services that CRLA offers and educate individuals on their working rights.   |

|    | Activities   | Deliverables   | Timelines                |
|----|--|--|--------------------------|
| 1  | Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor                                       | Final capstone project idea approved   | Oct – Nov 2018           |
| 2  | Develop questionnaire for tabling events to assess participant knowledge of CRLA | Submit draft questionnaire to mentor for review and approval                     | Nov – Dec 2018           |
| 4  | Confirm location for tabling events  | Site location & dates/times approved for tabling                                 | Nov- Dec 2018            |
| 5  | Request funding for gift cards and seek resources (as needed)                    | Mentor approval/assistance to secure needed resources and funding                | Nov- Dec 2018            |
| 6  | Gather all resources and materials for tabling                                   | Final approved outreach materials distributed                                    | Jan 2019                 |
| 7  | Implement capstone project and use the questionnaire                             | Completing tabling events  | Feb 1 – April 2019       |
| 8  | Gather and analyze data from the questionnaire                                   | Submit preliminary results from the questionnaire to mentor for review/approval  | April, 2019              |
| 9  | Complete reporting requirements  | Final agency and capstone reports  | May 3, 2019              |
| 10 | Prepare capstone presentation in selected format                                 | Instructor approval & dress rehearsal of final capstone presentation for grading | May 8-10, 2019           |
| 11 | Final preparation for Capstone Festival  | Final presentation at Capstone Festival  | May 15 or 16, 2019 (TBD) |

**Appendix C:****Questionnaire****English**

1) Do you know about the legal services that the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) provides? **Say no skip question # 2**

2) Have you ever access CRLA legal services? If so, when and what was your experience?

3) What are some challenges that would prevent you from accessing CRLA legal services?

Options

Work availability

Location/hours of intake

Transportation

Immigration status

Afraid to speak out

Other reasons:

**Spanish**

1) ¿Sabe qué servicios provee la oficina Asistencia legal o conocido como legal Aid?  
**si dicen no omitir la pregunta # 2**

2) ¿Alguna vez ha recibido ayuda de Asistencia Rural Legal de California? ¿Si es así, cuándo y como fue su experiencia?

3) ¿Que impide que usted pida ayuda legal de Asistencia Rural Legal de California?

Opciones

Disponibilidad de trabajo

Horas de consulta/ ubicación de oficina

Falta de transporte

Estado de inmigración

Miedo

Otra razon:

